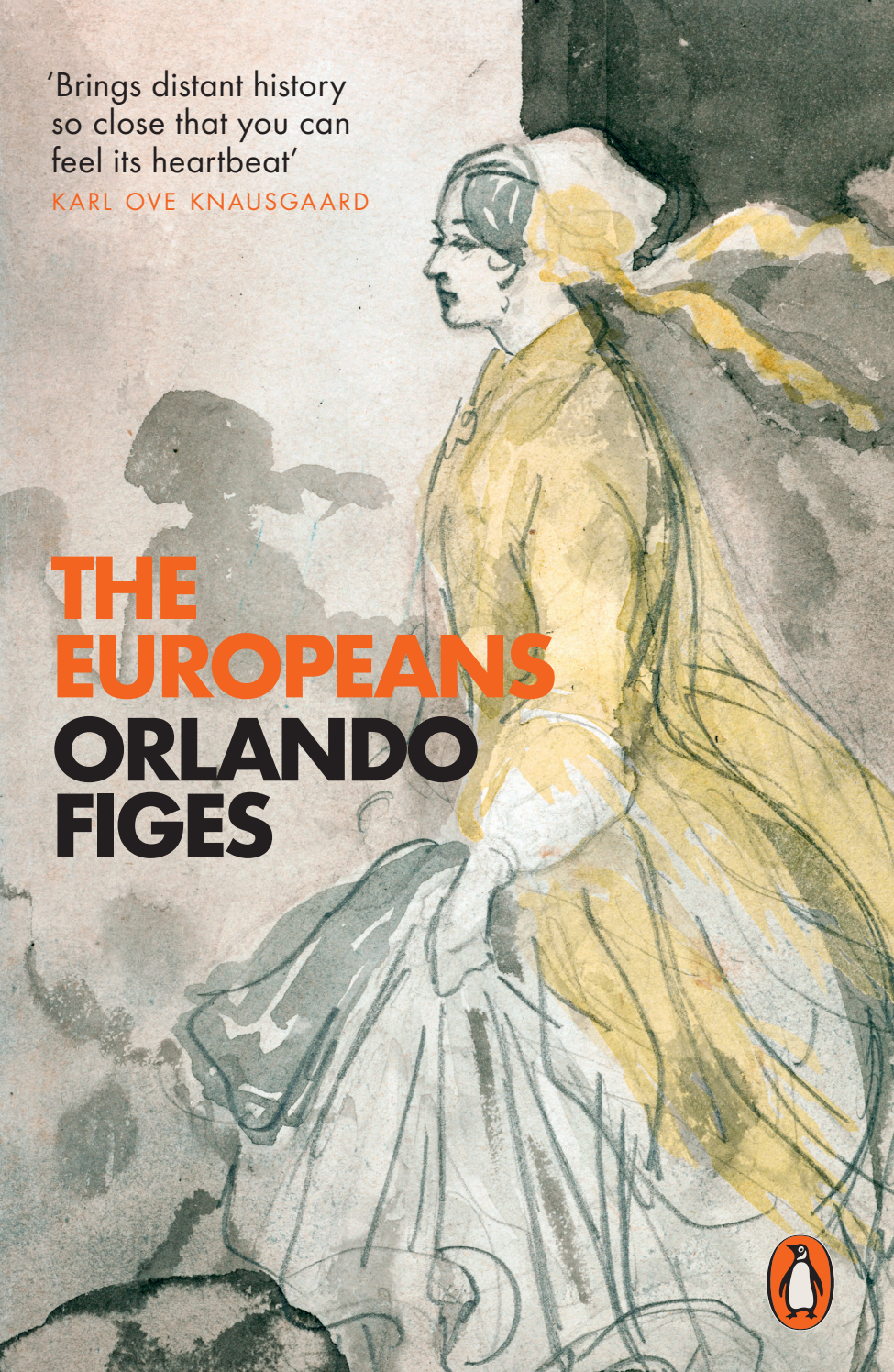

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Suzannah Lipscomb, *BBC History Magazine*, Books of the Year

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Karl Ove Knausgaard

'A monumental work . . . will surely come as a welcome vivification of a splendid if vanished way of life'
Dan Hofstadter, *Wall Street Journal*

'I loved the book. I read it in every spare moment, fascinated and sometimes surprised. . . . I have been speaking about the book to everyone I know: it is clearly not just a book for musicians but for the widest audience interested in literature, music and art'
Barbara Hannigan

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Orlando Figes is Professor of History at Birkbeck College, University of London. He is the author of *Peasant Russia, Civil War*, *A People's Tragedy*, *Natasha's Dance*, *The Whisperers*, *Crimea* and *Just Send Me Word*. His work has won a number of major prizes and has been translated into some twenty different languages.

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ORLANDO FIGES

The Europeans

Three Lives and the Making of a Cosmopolitan Culture



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For my sister, Kate

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When the arts of all countries, with their native qualities, have become accustomed to reciprocal exchanges, the character of art will be enriched everywhere to an incalculable extent, without the genius peculiar to each nation being changed. In this way a European school will be formed in place of the national sects which still divide the great family of artists; then, a universal school, familiar with the world, to which nothing human will be foreign.

Théophile Thoré, '*Des tendances de l'art au xix^e^ siècle*' (1855)

Money has emancipated the writer, money has created modern literature.

Émile Zola, '*Money in Literature*' (1880)

'You are a foreigner of some sort,' said Gertrude.

'Of some sort – yes; I suppose so. But who can say of what sort? I don't think we have ever had occasion to settle the question. You know there are people like that. About their country, their religion, their profession, they can't tell.'

Henry James, *The Europeans* (1878)

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A Note on Money

I have given monetary figures in their original currencies but have added in parentheses a French-franc equivalent where this may be useful for comparison. The French franc was the currency most widely used in Europe in the nineteenth century, and it was in francs that the people at the centre of this book mostly handled their affairs.

The exchange rates between Europe's major currencies remained relatively stable for most of the nineteenth century. They depended on the metal content of the coins. The key stabilizing factor was the British pound, which was on the gold standard. Other currencies established stable exchange rates with the British pound by moving to the silver standard (as did most of the German and Scandinavian states) or the bimetallic (gold and silver) standard (as did France and Russia). From the 1870s there was a general European move towards parity with gold.

In the middle decades of the nineteenth century 100 French francs were worth roughly

4 British pounds
25 Russian silver roubles*
90 Milanese (Austrian) lire
19 Roman scudi
23 Neapolitan ducats
38 Austrian gulden

* There were two types of rouble in circulation until 1843: the silver rouble (worth then about four French francs), used for foreign payments, and the assignat or paper rouble, which could be exchanged for the silver rouble at a rate of 3.5 to 1. In 1843, the paper rouble was replaced by State credit notes.

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27 Prussian thaler
100 Belgian francs
20 US dollars

As an indicator of value the simple conversion of currencies can be misleading because it fails to take into account differences in purchasing power. The cost of living in Britain was generally higher than on the Continent, although some items (such as cotton) were cheaper because of the benefits of industrialization and empire. Higher costs were reflected in higher wages in Britain too. The British professional classes were paid significantly more than their confrères on the Continent. In 1851, the salary of a British judge in the Court of Appeal was £6,000 (around 150,000 francs), twice the annual income of his French equivalent. The fellow of an Oxford college had a basic income of £600 per year (around 15,000 francs), more than a professor at the Sorbonne earned (around 12,000 francs a year). Lower down the social scale the differential was less significant. A 'middling' British family would generally have an annual income of around £200 (5,000 francs) in the 1850s, an income at least equalled by the vast majority of bourgeois families in France, where dowries continued to supplement the household income more substantially than in Britain. A French mechanic or junior engineer earned anything between 3,000 and 7,000 francs a year. A skilled urban labourer or clerk had an annual salary of anything between 800 francs and 1,500 francs. At this end of the social scale British salaries were similar.

In the arts incomes were extremely variable. In monetary terms the writers, artists and musicians featured in this book were located on the scale described above anywhere between the best-paid judge and the worst-paid mechanic. A few examples must suffice to illustrate the variations in income. At the peak of his career, in the 1850s, the painter Ary Scheffer earned between 45,000 and 160,000 francs per year; but many artists, such as Scheffer's protégé, Théodore Rousseau, meanwhile made less than 5,000 francs a year. Before 1854, the writer Victor Hugo received from his writings, on average, 20,000 francs per year. George Sand and Ivan Turgenev earned about the same amount – the latter getting as much money again from his estates in Russia. Between 1849 and 1853 the composer Robert Schumann earned, on average, around 1,600 Prussian thalers (6,000 francs) from his compositions

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every year, an income supplemented by his salary as music director in Düsseldorf, which paid 750 thalers (approximately 2,800 francs) per year.

It is almost impossible to translate these figures into today's terms. The cost of goods and services was very different in the nineteenth century. Labour was a lot cheaper (and in Russia free for landowners owning serfs); rent was far less costly too; but food was relatively expensive in the cities. To help readers get a general sense of monetary values in the mid-nineteenth century: a million francs was a large fortune, purchasing goods and services worth around £5,000,000 ($6,500,000) in today's terms; 100,000 francs was enough to buy a château with extensive land (such as the one at Courtavenel purchased by the Viardots); while 10,000 francs, worth approximately £50,000 ($65,000) today, was the price the Viardots paid for an organ made by the famous organ-builder Aristide Cavaillé-Coll in 1848.

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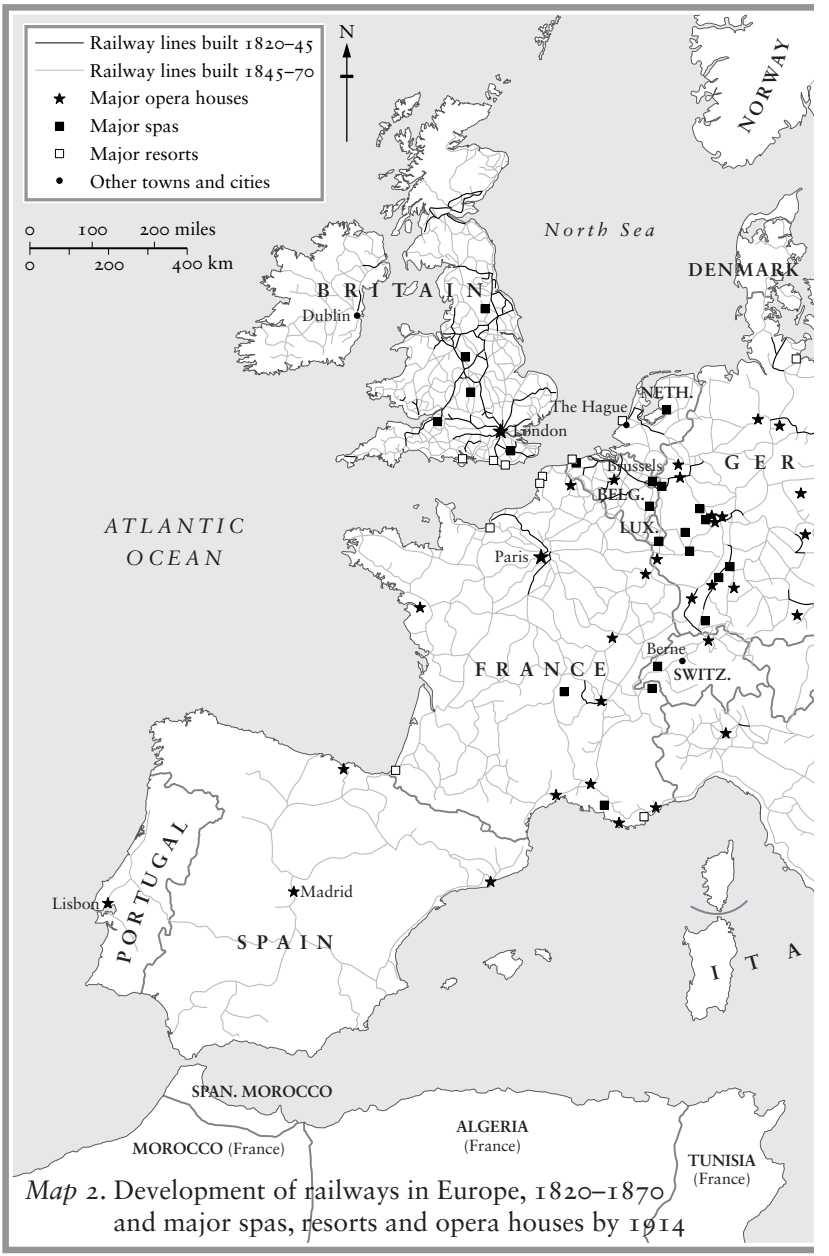


Map 1. Europe in the early 1840s

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Map 2. Development of railways in Europe, 1820–1870 and major spas, resorts and opera houses by 1914

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Places mentioned in the text

1 Madeleine
2 Sacré Coeur (*under construction*)
3 Panthéon
4 Palais-Royal
5 Bibliothéque Nationale
6 Palais Luxembourg
7 Sorbonne
8 50 rue de Douai
9 210 rue de Rivoli
10 Square d'Orléans
11 Théâtre-Italien
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14 240 rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré
15 243 boulevard Saint-Germain
16 Salle Pleyel
17 Théâtre de l'Odéon
18 Opéra-Comique
19 Drouot Auction Rooms
20 rue Chaptal
21 National Assembly

major rail terminuses
railway line
public parks and green spaces
cemetery

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Introduction

The first steam engine pulled out of the Gare Saint-Lazare on its pioneering journey to Brussels at 7.30 in the morning, on a sunny Saturday, 13 June 1846. Two more locomotives followed it in sequence while the crowd cheered and the band played to send them on their way. Each of the three trains was made up of twenty open carriages decked out in the French and Belgian tricolours. Their 1,500 passengers had been invited by Baron James de Rothschild to celebrate the opening of the Paris–Brussels railway, which his company, the Chemins de Fer du Nord, had recently completed with the building of the line from the French capital to Lille.

It was not the first international railway. Three years earlier, in 1843, the Belgians had inaugurated a railroad from Antwerp to Cologne in Prussia's Rhine province. But the Paris–Brussels line was especially important because it opened up a high-speed connection linking France and the Low Countries, Britain (via Ostend or Dunkirk) and the German-speaking lands. The French press heralded the new railway as the beginning of Europe's unification under the cultural dominance of France. 'Inviting foreigners to see our arts, our institutions, and all that makes us great is the surest way to maintain the good opinion of our country in Europe,' reasoned the commission that approved the building of the line to Lille.[1]

The first train carried the official dignitaries, the Ducs de Nemours and Montpensier, sons of the French king, accompanied by French and Belgian ministers, police chiefs and various celebrities, among them the writers Alexandre Dumas, Victor Hugo and Théophile Gautier, as well as the painter Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres. Travelling from Paris at the unheard-of speed of thirty kilometres per hour, the advance party reached Lille in the sweltering heat of the afternoon. With their windswept hair and fine clothes covered in dust from the open-air journey,

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the travellers descended at a temporary station outside the medieval walls, where they were met by the city's leaders, the Archbishop of Cambrai, and a mounted guard of honour bearing French and Belgian flags. After the playing of the national anthems by a military band, the dignitaries walked in procession through the decorated streets, where such large crowds had assembled that the National Guard struggled to maintain order. Thieves were everywhere, there were scenes of chaos when the drinks ran out, and alarms were raised as a fire broke out in the Palace of Justice.[2]

The festivities began with a magnificent banquet given by Rothschild for 2,000 people in a vast marquee on the site of the future railway station, at that time being built inside the medieval walls. Sixty cooks and 400 waiters served up generous helpings of poached salmon in white sauce, York ham with fruits, quails *au gratin*, partridges *à la régence*, creamed beans, cheeses, desserts and French wines, whereupon the toasts began: 'To the unity of France and Belgium!' 'To international peace!' Rothschild made a heartfelt speech about the railways bringing Europe's nations together.[3]

As evening drew in there was a 'monster concert' on the esplanade, where Berlioz conducted a first performance of his *Grande Symphonie funèbre et triomphale* by 400 bandsmen from the local garrisons. The organizers had insisted on adding twelve cannons to the orchestra which were meant to fire on the final chords of the Apotheosis. But when the moment came they could not be fired because the lighters had been lost, although two were lit with a cigar, which caused their fuses to fizzle in the air, fooling some of the audience into thinking that had been intended all along.[4]

Berlioz had been commissioned to compose a cantata, *Le Chant des chemins de fer*, to a text by the writer Jules Janin celebrating international peace and brotherhood, ideals which the railways inspired. Composed for a tenor soloist, orchestra and several choirs, the cantata was performed at a banquet in the Hôtel de Ville following the concert on the esplanade. 'The cantata was sung with uncommon verve and fresh voices,' Berlioz reported to his sister Nanci. 'But while I was in conversation in the adjoining room with the Ducs de Nemours and Montpensier, who had asked for me, my hat was stolen, along with the music of the cantata.'[5] The score was recovered, but the hat was not.

At two o'clock in the morning, the convoy of revellers continued on

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their journey to Brussels. At Kortrijk, the first Belgian town, the whole population appeared at the station to greet the extraordinary trains from France. At Ghent there was a military parade with a cannonade. For the last stretch of the route, from Mechelen, the front two trains progressed in parallel, entering the station in Brussels, to cheers from the assembled crowd, at the same time. The French princes were received on the platform by Léopold, the Belgian king, and his French wife, Louise of Orléans, the princes' elder sister. There was a banquet in the Grand Palace, and a ball given by the Belgian Railways in the newly opened Gare du Nord. The station was converted into a ballroom by constructing a wooden floor above the tracks, suspending chandeliers from the glass roof, and importing tulips by the wagonload from Holland. 'We have never seen a ball as magnificent as this,' claimed the correspondent of *Le National*.[6]

In the early hours of the next morning, the visitors from France began their return to Paris. The 330-kilometre journey took just twelve hours – a quarter of the time it usually required to make the trip by stagecoach, the fastest mode of transport before the railway.

Soon national boundaries were being crossed by railways everywhere. A new era for European culture had begun. Artists and their works could now move around the Continent much more easily. Berlioz would travel on the line from Paris to Brussels on his way to Russia for a concert tour in 1847 (at that time he could only get as far as Berlin by railway, but on his second tour of Russia, twenty years later, he could travel all the way from Paris to St Petersburg by train). From these decades, the railways would be used by orchestras and choirs, opera and theatre companies, touring exhibitions of artistic works, and writers on reading tours. The formidable weight of many artistic enterprises, which would have required incredible numbers of horses and carriages, was relatively effortlessly moved by steam power. An international market would be opened up for cheap mass reproductions of paintings, books and sheet music. The modern age of foreign travel would begin, enabling Europeans in much greater numbers to recognize their commonalities. It allowed them to discover in these works of art their own 'Europeanness', the values and ideas they shared with other peoples across Europe, above and beyond their separate nationalities.

How this 'European culture' was created is the subject of this book. It sets out to explain how it came about that by around 1900 the same

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books were being read across the Continent, the same paintings reproduced, the same music played at home or heard in concert halls, and the same operas performed in all the major theatres of Europe. How, in sum, the European canon – which forms the basis of today's high culture not just in Europe but all around the globe where Europeans settled – was established in the railway age. An élite international culture had existed in Europe since at least the Renaissance. It was built on Christianity, Classical literature, philosophy and learning, and had spread through Europe's courts, academies and city states. But it was only in the nineteenth century that a relatively integrated mass culture was able to develop right across the continent.

The Europeans is an international history. It looks at Europe as a whole, not divided into nation states or geographic zones, as in the majority of European histories, which have mostly focused on the role of culture in the nationalist movements and nation-building projects of the nineteenth century rather than on the arts as a unifying force between nations. My aim is to approach Europe as a space of cultural transfers, translations and exchanges crossing national boundaries, out of which a 'European culture' – an international synthesis of artistic forms, ideas and styles – would come into existence and distinguish Europe from the broader world.[7] As Kenneth Clark once said, nearly all the great advances in civilization – and the glittering achievements of European culture in the nineteenth century undoubtedly were one – have been during periods of the utmost internationalism, when people, ideas and artistic creations circulated freely between nations.[8]

In many ways the book is an exploration of the railway age as the first period of cultural globalization – for that is in effect what the creation of a European market for the arts in the nineteenth century represents. There were many who opposed this process from the start – nationalists, most obviously, who feared that the international flow of cultural traffic would undermine their nation's distinct culture and originality – but nobody was capable of stopping it. In ways beyond the political control of any nation state, the great technological and economic transformations of the nineteenth century (the revolution in mass communications and travel, the invention of lithographic printing and photography, the ascendancy of the free-market system) were the hidden motive forces behind the creation of a 'European culture' – a supranational space for the circulation of ideas and works of art stretching right across the Continent.

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At the heart of the book is the new relationship between the arts and capitalism which developed in the nineteenth century. There is as much in it about the economics of the arts (technologies of production, business management, marketing, publicity, social networks, the problem of combating piracy) as there is about the works of art themselves. My focus is on forms of art that were most engaged in the capitalist system through their printed reproduction for the marketplace (the main source of profit for literature, music and painting) or because they functioned as a business once they lost State subsidies (e.g. opera). Sculpture and large public works of art are of less significance for my thesis. In the end it was the market that determined the European canon, deciding which works would survive, and which (a much greater number) would be lost and forgotten.

Three people stand at the centre of this book: the writer Ivan Turgenev (1818–83), the singer and composer Pauline Viardot (1821–1910), with whom Turgenev had a long and intimate relationship, and her husband, Louis Viardot (1800–1883), a now forgotten but in his time important art critic, scholar, publisher, theatre manager, republican activist, journalist and literary translator into French from both Russian and Spanish (everything, in other words, that is not the artist but on which the artist depends). Their biographies are woven through the narrative, which follows them around Europe (between them they lived at different times in France, Spain, Russia, Germany and Britain, and travelled widely through the rest of it), engages with those people whom they knew (almost everyone of any real importance on the European cultural scene), and explores those issues that affected them as artists and promoters of the arts.

In their different ways, Turgenev and the Viardots were figures in the arts adapting to the market and its challenges. Pauline had been born into a family of itinerant singers, so commercial enterprise was in her blood; but she was extremely skilful in her exploitation of the new economy and, as a woman, unusually independent for this patriarchal age. Louis acted as her manager in the early years of their marriage. As the director of the Théâtre Italien, one of Europe's major opera houses, he had quickly learned how to operate in a free market, but his business acumen was always moderated by an academic temperament. As for Turgenev, he had been born into the Russian aristocracy, whose sons were expected to enter public service and live off their estates. He had no head for business when he started out as a writer.

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Through their international connections, Turgenev and the Viardots were important cultural intermediaries, promoting writers, artists and musicians across Europe and helping them establish foreign markets for their work. The people who attended their salons at various times in Paris, Baden and London represent a *Who's Who* of the European arts, high society and politics.

This was an international culture that vanished on the outbreak of the First World War. Turgenev and the Viardots were cosmopolitans, members of a European cultural élite, capable of living anywhere on European soil, provided it did not compromise their democratic principles, without losing any of their nationality. They found their home in 'European Civilization'. Burke's famous phrase – that 'No European can be a complete exile in any part of Europe'[9] – might have been designed for them.

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1
Europe in 1843

Space is killed by the railways, and we are left with time alone . . . Now you can travel to Orléans in four and a half hours, and it takes no longer to get to Rouen. Just imagine what will happen when the lines to Belgium and Germany are completed and connected up with these railways. I feel as if the mountains and forests of all countries are advancing on Paris. Even now, I can smell the German linden trees; the North Sea breakers are rolling against my door.

Heinrich Heine, 1843

1

At eight o'clock in the evening of 3 November 1843, a full house at the Bolshoi Theatre in St Petersburg waited in excitement for the curtain to go up. The house was packed to see the great soprano Pauline Viardot make her Russian debut as Rosina in *The Barber of Seville*. In the front rows of the stalls, seated in armchairs, were the highest-ranking dignitaries of the Russian Empire, all dressed in tailcoats, alongside their wives and daughters, mostly dressed in white, the colour of the season; behind them were ministers in evening dress and officers in uniforms. There was not a spare seat to be had, neither in the *bel-étage* nor in any of the private boxes in the four lower tiers, where the nobility was all turned out, diamonds twinkling in the light from the oil-lamps of the immense chandelier. In the cheapest seats on the fifth and highest tier, above the level of the chandelier, students, clerks and serious music lovers squeezed up tight on the benches and strained their necks to see

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the stage. The auditorium was buzzing with excitement as the late arrivals took their places and the overture began. The imminent appearance of the famous singer with Giovanni Rubini and his Italian company of singers had been the only compelling subject of salon conversation in St Petersburg for many weeks. The press build-up was so intense that one newspaper tried to jump the gun by publishing a piece about Viardot's first performance – complete with descriptions of the wild applause – two days before it took place.[1]

Viardot-Garcia, as she was then known, struck everybody by her appearance. With her long neck, large protruding eyes and heavy lids, she looked exotically unusual, some would even say horsey; but her gracious smile and hazel eyes, sparkling with intelligence, and the liveliness of her expressions, which reflected her vivacious character, gave an alluring interest to her face. 'Richly ugly' was how she was described by the Russian Foreign Minister, Count Karl Nesselrode, on her debut in St Petersburg. The poet Heinrich Heine, a famous wit, thought she was so unattractive that she was 'almost beautiful'.[2]

Her voice was the key to her spellbinding presence on stage. It had a tremendous force, extraordinary range and versatility.* It was not a soft or crystal voice – some thought it was guttural – but had a dramatic power, an emotional intensity, that suited it equally to tragedy or to the Spanish gypsy songs she often sang (Camille Saint-Saëns compared it to the taste of 'bitter oranges').[3] Clara Schumann, who heard her sing in Paris in August 1843, thought she had 'never yet heard a woman's voice like that'.[4] The Russians agreed. 'We have heard many first-rate singers but none has overwhelmed us in this way,' wrote one critic of that first performance in St Petersburg. 'The astonishing range of her voice, its unrivalled virtuosity, its magical, silvery tonality, those passages which even the trained ear could barely follow – we have not heard anything like it before.'[5] After the final curtain had gone down, she was called out nine times by the audience, which remained standing in the theatre, not one person heading to the exits, for a full hour.

* Technically, by today's standards, Viardot was a mezzo-soprano, but that term was not commonly used until the late nineteenth century, so she would have been billed as a soprano. The Rosina role in *The Barber of Seville* was originally written for a contralto but is now known as one of the staple roles for a mezzo-soprano.

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The Russian public was passionate about opera. It displayed a spontaneous enthusiasm which delighted Viardot.[6] She brought the house down on the second night when she sang a well-known Russian air in the Act II lesson scene. She had taken Russian lessons to get the diction right. It was a piece of showmanship she often used to win the hearts of an audience abroad. Tsar Nicholas was so delighted that he led the exuberant applause, received the singer in the Imperial box, and the next morning sent her a pair of diamond earrings, which Pauline at once had valued.[7]

Levels of excitement reached new heights with each fresh performance. Viardot herself felt her voice improving every night as she worked through the season's repertoire, following her debut in *The Barber of Seville* with equally sensational performances in Rossini's *Otello,* Bellini's *La Sonnambula* and Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor.* Every aria was applauded with cries of '*Brava!*' Every act ended with a dozen curtain calls, most of them for Viardot. At the final curtain of *La Sonnambula* there were fifteen calls for her alone. The Tsarina, seated in the side box by the curtain, threw a camellia that landed by the prima donna's feet. The gesture broke an Imperial interdiction against throwing flowers on the stage. From the next night, after every aria by Viardot, flowers were thrown on the stage. Florists did a roaring trade. Every available bouquet was bought up by 'fanatics' of the opera – the new ritual itself became the subject of a contemporary vaudeville, *Bouquets*, by Vladimir Sologub.[8]

This was the height of the Russian craze for Italian opera. Few other operas could get a hearing in St Petersburg. In the 1843–4 season there were almost twice as many performances of Italian operas than there were of Russian ones. Even Mikhail Glinka, the 'inventor of the Russian opera', whose *Ruslan and Liudmilla* and *A Life for the Tsar* had filled the Bolshoi Theatre almost every night in the early months of 1843, found his works demoted to Sundays and then despatched to the provinces once Rubini's company had arrived. Glinka was in fact long accustomed to the domination of Italians. He had lived in Italy in the early 1830s and could not help but adapt his music to the fashionable Italian style with its cheerful melodies and virtuoso thrills. His most 'Russian' work, *A Life for the Tsar* (1836), positively 'reeked of Italianism', as he later acknowledged.[9]

This Italomania was relatively new. Although the tsarist court had

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kept a resident Italian opera in the eighteenth century, there was none in Russia after 1801, except in the Black Sea port of Odessa, where many non-Russians lived. The exiled poet Alexander Pushkin heard a mediocre touring company perform Rossini operas in Odessa in the 1823–4 season. The experience inspired these lines in Pushkin's verse novel *Eugene Onegin* (1825), in which the bored narrator lets his lorgnette rove around the opera house:

> And what of other fascinations?
> And what of keen lorgnettes, I say?
> And in the wings . . . the assignations?
> The prima donna? The ballet?
> The loge, where, beautiful and gleaming,
> A merchant's youthful wife sits dreaming,
> All vain and languorous with pride,
> A crowd of slaves on every side?
> She heeds, and doesn't heed the roses,
> The cavatina, heated sighs,
> The jesting praise, the pleading eyes . . .
> While in the back her husband dozes,
> Cries out from sleep *Encore!* – and then
> Emits a yawn and snores again.[10]

Italian opera came back into fashion in St Petersburg only after 1836, when a Russified Venetian, Catterino Cavos, the director of the Bolshoi Theatre, made a splash with a production of Rossini's *Semiramide*.

Russia was the last European country to be swept up in this international craze. It attracted ageing stars eager to cash in on their past fame. In 1841, the great Giuditta Pasta, then at the end of her career, her voice almost completely gone, appeared with the Russian opera in the title role of Bellini's *Norma*, a part she had sung in the opera's first performance ten years earlier. Soon afterwards the Russians welcomed the 'greatest tenor of the age', Rubini, now aged forty-nine, who had been advised by Liszt, the virtuoso pianist and composer, to follow his example and make a tour of Russia for the piles of cash the naive Russians were prepared to pay for 'civilization'. Keen to put St Petersburg on a cultural par with Paris, Vienna and London, the Tsar paid Rubini a fortune (80,000 paper roubles, or 90,000 francs) as his fee for bringing an Italian opera troupe to St Petersburg in the 1843–4 season. Viardot,

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alone, received 60,000 roubles as well as half the earnings from other concerts she was free to give.[11] It was a level of remuneration few opera singers had received before. Such expenditure was fully justified by the prestige the troupe brought to the Russian capital, according to the Tsar's own spokesman, the editor Faddei Bulgarin, who wrote in his newspaper, *The Northern Bee*, during that first season:

> Let's admit it: without an Italian opera troupe it would always seem as if something were missing in the capital of the foremost empire in the world! There would seem to be no focal point for opulence, splendour, and cultivated diversion. In all the capitals of Europe the richest accoutrements, the highest tone, all the refinements of society are concentrated at the Italian Opera. This cannot be changed, nor should it be.[12]

In Western Europe opera had flourished since the seventeenth century. From its origins as a private court event, opera was soon transformed into a public spectacle, first in Venice and then throughout Italy. Unlike in France, where opera was under royal control, every major town in Italy had its own theatre and a group of nobles or rich merchants and professionals to manage it (the first Italian national census in 1868 recorded 775 opera houses in active existence).[13] The business model was fairly uniform throughout the peninsula. Forming a consortium of boxholders, the owners of the theatre would contract with an impresario, usually a former singer or musician, who employed a company for a season (few provincial theatres could afford to keep a troupe). The impresario would receive an advance from the owners and would take the profits from the sale of tickets in the stalls, while the theatre earned its income from leasing private boxes for an annual fee.[14] The small size of the audience, drawn from the élite of a single town, obliged companies to tour constantly to reach a larger audience. Opera thus became a unifying element of the various states in Italy, its language understood even where the people spoke a dialect rather than Italian.

Touring companies exported opera from Italy to the European courts. New theatres were built for its needs in every European capital. Where opera took root in the eighteenth century – in Handel's London or Gluck's Vienna – it did so in a style that was essentially Italian. Such was the domination of Italian opera that composers of every nationality were

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drawn into writing it: the German Simon Mayr composed over fifty operas for Italian opera houses between 1795 and 1820; Mozart, as a teenager, wrote three operas for La Scala in Milan, as well as going on to write many others in Italian for Austrian theatres. But it was Rossini who first cornered an international market for Italian opera. Conquering theatres across Europe and the wider world, he was a musical Napoleon, in the estimation of Stendhal, his earliest biographer: 'Napoleon is dead; but a new conqueror has already shown himself to the world; and from Moscow to Naples, from London to Vienna, from Paris to Calcutta, his name is constantly on every tongue. The fame of this hero knows no bounds save those of civilization itself.'[15]

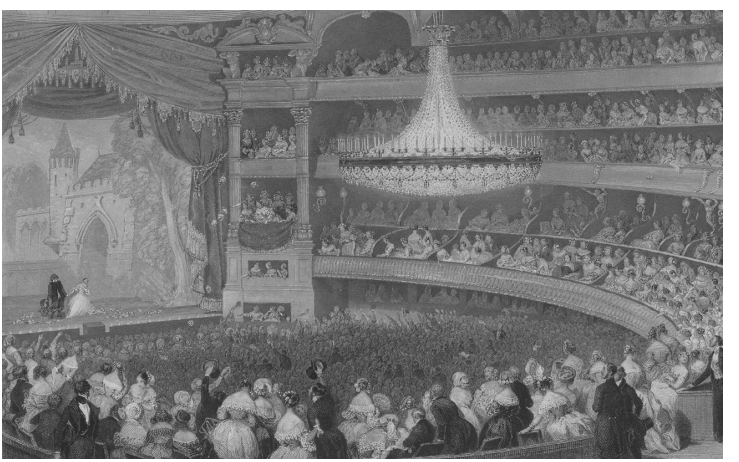
The employment of Rossini was a virtual guarantee of making money for an opera house. His tuneful and lighthearted operas would prove ideally suited to the mood of the Restoration period, when frothy entertainment was the order of the day. Following the dazzling successes of his early operas, especially *Tancredi* (1813), Rossini was employed as musical director of the San Carlo in Naples, at that time the leading theatre in the world. Its manager was Domenico Barbaja, an astute businessman turned impresario, who had stumbled on a novel method to make opera pay.

Barbaja had started his career as a waiter in a café near La Scala in Milan. He had made a killing by delivering refreshments to people in their boxes at the opera and by inventing a new type of coffee mixed with cream and chocolate (a type of mocha) that became all the rage. During the French occupation of Milan (from 1796 to 1815), the previous Austrian ban on gambling in the theatres was lifted. Barbaja won the lucrative concession to run the roulette tables (a game brought to Italy by Napoleon's officers) in La Scala's entrance hall. His gambling empire quickly spread to other cities conquered by the French. The organizing skills Barbaja had developed to run his gaming syndicate were easily transferred to opera management, where large amounts of cash were also regularly moved around. In Naples, where he was in charge of not only the San Carlo but the smaller Teatro dei Fiorentini, Barbaja used the profits from his roulette wheels to hire the best singers for the opera. As musical director of the San Carlo from 1815 to 1822, Rossini was contracted to write two operas every year, for which he was paid a salary of 12,000 French francs and received a share of all Barbaja's takings from the roulette wheels – considerably more than Rossini earned from his music.[16]

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With the international triumph of *The Barber of Seville* (1816) and *La Cenerentola* (1817) Rossini became a global phenomenon. When Barbaja took over the Vienna Opera in 1822, he employed Rossini there. The Viennese nobility soon succumbed to the Italian craze, in spite of the nationalist critics who opposed this 'foreign invasion' and rallied their supporters behind Carl Maria von Weber's *Der Freischütz* (1821), a work they championed as a 'German national opera', mainly on account of its folk motifs and language (in fact its style was largely French and its setting in Bohemia). Likewise, in London, where Rossini spent five months in 1823, he was greeted as an international celebrity. Rossini's every movement was reported in the press, if only to remark on his fat and jolly figure walking to his rooms in the Quadrant, Regent Street, then just completed by John Nash. Popular demand for his music was insatiable. All three London opera houses (the King's Theatre, the Drury Lane Theatre and the Theatre Royal in Covent Garden) catered to the craze for Rossini's operas.[17]

But it was in Paris that Rossini had his biggest impact on the opera world. In 1824, he became director of the Théâtre Italien, one of the city's three main opera theatres under royal control, the others being the Paris Opéra and the Opéra-Comique. Rossini's contract was lucrative. Following his triumph in London, the French court was willing to



The Théâtre Italien, engraving, c. 1840.

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accept the composer's extravagant demands: 40,000 francs for the first year, when he was meant to write two operas, and the recognition of his copyright on an equal basis with all citizens under French law, the most advanced protection in Europe at that time.[18] Over the six years of his directorship, the Théâtre Italien became one of the leading opera houses in Europe. The Paris Opéra was in the doldrums by comparison. People had grown tired of the old French operas – now long lost or forgotten works by the likes of Christoph Gluck, André Grétry or Nicolas Dalayrac – which made up so much of its repertoire. They flocked instead to the 'Italiens', as it was fondly called, where Rossini reigned, in the words of Stendhal, as a 'citizen monarch'.

The Salle Favart, its auditorium, was not just a theatre but a way of life ('as much a salon as an opera house', according to Gautier). Exclusively devoted to the Italian repertoire, it was a place for elegant society, for opera fanatics (the 'tribe of *dilettanti*' who posed as cognoscenti), serious music lovers and intellectuals, as opposed to the more stately public of the Opéra's Salle Le Peletier. The novelist George Sand, the poet Alfred de Musset and the painter Eugène Delacroix were regulars at the Italiens. Because the stalls were barred to women, Sand appeared dressed as a man, wearing a long military coat with trousers and a waistcoat, the fashion of the day, cravat and hat and hobnailed boots, an outfit which she also wore elsewhere. Among the French Romantics only Berlioz, a devotee of the Gluck school, despised the cult of Italian opera and 'more than once debated with myself the possibility of mining the Théâtre Italien and blowing it up one evening, along with all its congregation of Rossinians'.[19] In contrast to the city's other music theatres, where the public talked throughout the performance, the audience at the Italiens listened more attentively: they were stilled and silenced by maestro Rossini when he knocked three times to signal the beginning of the overture.

In the early nineteenth century, the opera industry was an international business of itinerant tradesmen. The young Rossini earned his living until 1810 as a vocal coach (répétiteur) and harpsichord accompanist, both important music trades. He was then hired as a composer at the Teatro del Corso in Bologna. His contracts stipulated that he was a 'trader in music' (*mercante di musica*). Musicians still had a lowly status in the palaces and salons of the aristocracy, despite the efforts of

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composers such as Mozart to elevate their position. They appeared 'on the footing of inferiors', wrote Countess Marie d'Agoult, who lived with Liszt:

> If someone wanted to give a fine concert, he sent to Rossini, who, for a recognized fee – it was small enough, only 1500 francs if I recollect correctly – undertook to arrange the programme and to see to its carrying out, thus relieving the master of the house of all embarrassments in the way of choice of artists, of rehearsals and so on . . . At the appointed hour [the musicians] arrived in a body, entering by a side door; in a body they sat near the piano; and in a body they departed, after having received the compliments of the master of the house and of a few professed dilettantes.[20]

Typically, in the opera business, a composer would be engaged by an impresario to compose the music for a libretto, oversee the rehearsals, and conduct the first three performances as the player of the harpsichord. For his services he would receive a one-off fee that put him at the level of a master artisan. Once he had fulfilled his contract, the composer was free to leave and ply his trade in the next town. The production of an opera tended to be very quick, so it was possible to mount several operas in a year. *The Barber of Seville* received its first performance within a month of Rossini starting on the score. The singers were still learning their parts on the day of the premiere, which may in part explain why it ended in fiasco, with whistling and hissing from the audience, following a series of accidents on stage at the Teatro Argentine in Rome.

Rossini churned out operas at a furious rate – sixteen in his first five years of composing – many of them made up of recycled bits from his earlier works. This recycling was still a common practice by opera composers in the early nineteenth century, when people did not travel far: it was easy to pass off a rehashed work as something new in a distant town. Donizetti did so famously (he was caught and criticized for it). The pressure to compose quickly was the main reason why he reused music from his own previous scores. In 1832, when he had just a few weeks to compose *L'elisir d'amore*, Donizetti borrowed whole chunks of his *Alahor in Granata* (1826) and *Elizabeth at Kenilworth Castle* (1829).[21] Underlying this practice was the economy of opera production before the railway age, when theatres drew their public from a narrow

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geographic area and needed several new works every year to keep it entertained. Working in this industry did not always give composers time to write original material. In 1827, for example, Donizetti signed a contract with Barbaja in Naples to write twelve operas in the next three years, during which he would be paid a monthly salary of 400 ducats (approximately 2,100 francs). Nothing in the contract stipulated that the music of each opera should be new; as long as he produced enough in quantity, Donizetti would be paid.[22]

The leading singers earned more than the composers. People came to the opera to hear the star performers, and the music played a supporting role to showcase their talents. All the main composers would write for particular singers or adapt their scores to suit their vocal qualities. The fees paid to the prima donnas were astronomical. With the disappearance of the treasured *castrati* in the early decades of the nineteenth century, female singers were the highest paid in opera. It was not unusual for half an opera's production costs to go into the fees of the leading soloists, especially if these included famous divas like Giuditta Pasta or Maria Malibran, Viardot-Garcia's elder sister. They bargained hard for better pay and conditions, sometimes using agents, sometimes negotiating by themselves, but always with an eye to what their rivals were earning.[23]

Increasingly, the leading soloists were spending time on international tours, travelling wherever they could earn the highest pay. Improvements in road transport, steamships from the 1820s and railways later, pushed up fees, as more theatres were able to compete for their services. For the London season in 1827, for example, Pasta earned £2,365 (60,000 francs) – thirty times as much as any of the other soloists – for forty-five performances. In the early 1830s Malibran was paid even higher fees – £1,000 for just twelve performances at Covent Garden and £3,200 for forty nights at Drury Lane, not including earnings from a series of benefit concerts guaranteed to net £2,000. For a two-year contract in New York, from 1834, she was offered a fortune, 500,000 francs (£20,000), but turned it down.[24]

The concert tours by Liszt or Paganini were the only real comparison to the financial success of the leading divas. In 1831, according to one reckoning, Paganini earned 133,107 francs from just eleven concerts during March and April in Paris, and then in London, from May to July, was paid £10,000 (250,000 francs), enough to buy a mansion

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in Mayfair. People paid enormous sums to hear the virtuoso violinist play – a whole guinea for a stalls seat in the King's Theatre, almost three times the usual price. Ticket prices were inflated by extravagant accounts of his strange appearance and demonic personality, of his sexual conquests, and the hypnotic powers he was said to exercise through his playing – rumours Paganini encouraged by playing ever more wildly. Everything in his performance was calculated for sensational effect and spectacle. But he approached his tours as a businessman, keeping detailed accounts of his income and expenses in a 'secret book'. He employed concert managers to act as agents and handle the expenses for a share of the receipts – an innovation in the music industry, where composers had previously managed themselves. With his manager, Paganini controlled every aspect of his concerts, from finding venues to placing adverts in the press, hiring orchestras, employing ticket agents, and sometimes selling tickets at the door himself. He developed his own merchandising: print engravings, 'Paganini cakes' and other souvenirs of his concerts.[25]

Liszt took a leaf out of Paganini's book. Much of his early career was spent touring, from which he learned how to cultivate his own celebrity to attract an audience. Touring Europe with his father in 1823–4, Liszt had drawn enormous interest as a teenage prodigy. Reproduction prints of the precocious pianist were sold in Paris shops. His father charged 100 francs for his son to play in private homes. After his father's death in 1828, Liszt gave up on concert tours (he compared them to being a 'performing dog') and tried to make a living as a piano teacher. But then, in 1831, he heard Paganini play at the Paris Opéra. Liszt set out to create a new kind of piano repertoire by emulating the effects of Paganini's violin, its tremolos and leaps and glissandi. It was a type of virtuoso playing that set him on a highly profitable course of concert tours across Europe – from Spain and Portugal to Poland, Turkey and Russia – between 1839 and 1847. Whereas previous composers had mostly toured to enhance their reputation and win patrons, Liszt thought of his tours as a business venture whose purpose was to make him 'capital' – a word he used himself.[26] He employed an agent, Gaetano Belloni, who managed his accounts and worked with him on his public image for these tours. Liszt's flamboyant stage behaviour gave him an emotional appeal, encouraging his listeners to respond to his performance with strong emotions in the concert hall. 'Lisztomania' (a term coined

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by Heine) swept through Europe from 1843. Fans would swarm around the virtuoso pianist. Women in the front rows of his audience would fight to get the handkerchiefs or gloves which he dropped deliberately before seating himself at the piano. His cigar ashes were jealously guarded as 'relics'.[27] Thousands of his fans would buy the music of his most demanding pieces, even if they had no chance of ever being able to play them, solely for the reason that they wanted to possess a memento of the Liszt phenomenon.

The opera industry had many families and even dynasties of singers, dancers, instrumentalists, who toured around the theatres of Europe together. But the Garcias were the most talented, prolific and successful of them all. Liszt, who was a close friend of the Garcias, once wrote that Pauline had been 'born into a family where genius seemed to be hereditary'.[28]

Manuel Garcia, Pauline's father, was born in Seville in 1775, only five years after the last victim of the Spanish Inquisition was burned at the stake there as a heretic. For a long time it was thought that he had gypsy origins (Pauline believed it) but he probably invented this himself to add a Romantic aura to his stage personality. Garcia belonged to the first generation of professional singers independent of any patronage (by State, Church or aristocracy) and dependent on the market to make a living.[29] His voice had an extraordinary range, allowing him to sing both baritone and tenor roles. He had started as a singer and composer in Cadiz, where he married Manuela Morales, a bolero dancer, and then moved to Malaga, a centre of Italian opera in Spain, before becoming the musical director of the royal theatres in Madrid, where he took up with the singer Joaquina Briones, whom he married too.

Garcia composed in a Spanish style, incorporating folk songs and dances into his operettas, or *zarzuelas*. Later Spanish composers saw him as the founder of Spanish opera.[30] In Madrid there was little cultural space for the national tradition. The theatre there was given over to performing mainly French and Italian works. Abandoning Morales and their two small daughters, whom he continued to support financially, Garcia left for Paris with Joaquina, who had already given birth to Manuel's son, named after him. In 1807, he made his debut in the Théâtre Italien, where he soon became the leading tenor, celebrated for his brilliant virtuoso improvisations then deemed part of the Romantic

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singing style (the comparison between Paganini and Garcia would frequently be made).

A good-looking man with dark curly hair and 'gypsy' features, Garcia had a fiery and rebellious temperament. Much of his violence was taken out on Joaquina, who bore not only his beatings but the shame of passing for his mistress in public to conceal his crime of bigamy.[31] His tempestuous character often led to conflicts with the authorities (in Madrid he was even once imprisoned on the orders of the theatre management for refusing to perform). Garcia's solution to these conflicts was always to move on to a new place. Three years after the birth of their second child, Maria, in 1808, the Garcias left for Naples, where Manuel met Rossini, and then moved to Rome, where he sang the part of Count Almaviva – a role created especially for him – in the first performance of *The Barber of Seville*. From Rome they went to London, where the eight-year-old Maria was put into a convent school in Hammersmith. The Garcias then returned to Paris, where Pauline, their third child, was born in 1821.

From an early age the Garcia children were taught to sing by their father. He was a hard taskmaster and was said to hit them when they did not get their repetition right. Maria, who was as fiery as her father, suffered most on this account. Pauline, the youngest and his favourite, claimed years later that he had only hit her once, rightly she believed, and denied that he was cruel. He was in any case a first-class teacher and had his tried-and-tested pedagogic methods – based on hard work, discipline and exercises for the training of the voice – which he passed down to his children, enabling them to become famous singing teachers in their turn.

At the age of just fourteen Maria made her debut as Rosina in *The Barber of Seville* at the King's Theatre in London. Manuel sang the Almaviva role. He had fled Paris, where Morales had turned up, demanding money and threatening to expose him as a bigamist. Maria caused a sensation. Her voice was extraordinary, rich in tone, with a range of over three octaves that enabled her to sing both soprano and contralto roles. Manuel assumed the office of his daughter's manager, demanding higher fees for her than those earned by even well-established prima donnas. The English critics became hostile, so Manuel moved on again.

In 1825, he accepted a profitable offer to take his family and a company of singers to New York, where a group of wealthy men, who had

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fallen in love with Italian opera, were ready to support the trip. The 1820s saw a marked increase in the number of Italian opera troupes touring the Americas: the new wealth of cities such as Buenos Aires and New York acted as a magnet to adventurous touring groups.[32] Pauline, who was then aged four, learned to sing on the long sea voyage across the Atlantic. 'It was on a sailing boat that I was taught, without a piano, at first singing on my own, then with two voices and with three,' she recalled many years later. 'My father wrote some small canons, we sang them daily, in the evenings on the bridge, to the delight of the crew.'[33]

There was great excitement in America about the arrival of Italian music – much of it drummed up by no less a figure than Lorenzo da Ponte, Mozart's great librettist, who was then living in New York and teaching at Columbia College. The New York season opened with *The Barber of Seville* on 29 November 1825 (the first time an opera had been sung in Italian in the New World) before an audience that included Joseph Bonaparte, the exiled former King of Spain, and James Fenimore Cooper, who was just about to publish *The Last of the Mohicans*. The opera was a great success. Maria was hailed as a star. The season continued with Mozart's *Don Giovanni* – performed for the first time in the United States by four of the Garcias (the two Manuels, Maria and Joaquina) in the presence of da Ponte. But the opera-going public was too small – and there were no kings or noble patrons – to make opera a profitable venture in New York. The Garcias faced a more immediate problem when the seventeen-year-old Maria decided to escape her domineering father by marrying a New York banker of French origin by the name of Eugène Malibran. The banker paid a fortune, said to be as much as $50,000 (250,000 francs), to compensate Garcia for the loss of his lead singer.[34]

Without Maria, the Garcias left for Mexico, where at least people spoke Spanish. But it was virgin territory for opera. There were no real theatres in the European sense, and audiences were too small to make any money out of opera. In 1828, the family gave up and returned to Paris. On their way to Vera Cruz, the first part of their long trek back to Europe, their convoy was attacked by brigands operating in collusion with the convoy's escort of soldiers. The masked bandits forced the travellers to lie face downwards on the ground and robbed them of everything – 'down to our clothes', as Pauline would recall – a story she retold in the same vivid detail right until the end of her long life.[35]

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'God created me for travelling. It was in my blood from before I was born,' Pauline wrote many years later.[36] The constant movement of her early years, combined with the rigour of her father's teaching, imbued in her a steely stoicism and determination to succeed. It also made her talented at languages. Adding to the Spanish which she spoke at home, she was completely fluent in French, Italian and English from childhood, and in German from a little later on. There were, it seems, no mental barriers between her many languages: in her diaries and letters she expressed herself with natural ease in all of them, often shifting in mid-sentence from one language to another if it contained a better word.

In 1827, Pauline's elder sister had returned to Paris, where she made her debut in Rossini's *Semiramide* at the Théâtre Italien, launching her spectacular career in Europe. The extraordinary power of her voice, so simple in expression, her exotic Spanish looks, her passionate performance style and general air of melancholy perfectly embodied the Romantic spirit of the times, quickly winning for her a cult status among young Parisians. Malibran had left her banker husband in New York and taken up with Charles de Bériot, a Belgian violinist, living with him near Brussels and bearing him two children, only one of whom survived. Manuel refused to see Maria any more, declaring that her conduct 'offends and dishonours her entire family' (as if his own bigamy had not done so already).[37] Maria continued to send the family money, several thousand francs a year. She wrote to her mother asking her for news, but 'dared not' write to her father, because she was afraid that he would not reply. 'Let him know that he can be content with his daughter' was all that she would say.[38]

Manuel Garcia died of a sudden heart attack at the age of fifty-seven on 10 June 1832. Pauline and her mother joined Maria in Brussels (her brother Manuel had enrolled in the French expedition to Algeria two years earlier). Following her husband's death, Joaquina carried on the role of Pauline's coach and general manager. Pauline had shown a precocious talent for singing. At the age of four she had sung for the Duke of Wellington, and at eight for Rossini.[39] In Paris she was sent to study composition with Anton Reicha, the Czech-born composer and friend of Beethoven, whose pupils had included Berlioz and Liszt. At this stage Pauline seemed set on a career as a concert pianist – the piano, harp or voice being at that time the only instruments deemed fit for women performers. She had taken lessons from the cathedral organist

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in Mexico City and now, at the age of twelve, was taught by Liszt, who was then in his twenties. Naturally she fell in love with him. Getting dressed to go to her Saturday lessons, Pauline's hands would tremble so much from emotion that she could not tie the laces on her boots, she recalled many years later. 'When I knocked on his door, my blood would freeze; when he opened it, I would burst into tears . . . But what joy it was when we played together Herz's variations for four hands.'[40]

It was her mother who insisted that Pauline become a singer – a decision reinforced by Maria's death, at the age of twenty-eight, in 1836. She had fallen from her horse in Regent's Park in London two months earlier but had struggled on with her concert engagements until she finally collapsed and died in Manchester. In the last years of her short life she had been at the height of her international fame. Huge crowds would gather wherever she performed. At La Scala, where her performance of *Norma* had given Malibran an almost divine status, fans would stand for several hours just to see her enter the theatre. Her death sent shock waves around the opera world. Gautier and Musset both wrote poems to express their grief. The impact on the Garcias was obviously even more immense, coming as it did so shortly after Manuel's death. For Pauline it was decisive, determining that she would follow in the footsteps of Maria. To Joaquina it was inconceivable that there should be no Garcia singing on the stage.

Charles de Bériot took Pauline under his wing, organizing concerts for them both. In August 1836, three weeks after turning fifteen, Pauline made her concert debut with him in Liège. By coincidence, the composer Meyerbeer – who would go on to play a crucial role in her career – was in the audience.[41] From the start, she included Spanish songs as part of her repertoire. She had sung these songs since her childhood – many had been written by her father – and these 'party pieces' must have come across as charmingly original to audiences in northern Europe, where Spanish music was still then unknown. Pauline's first public performance was a triumph. During the next eighteen months, she appeared with Charles in several concerts in Brussels (once in the presence of the Belgian royal couple), as well as in Berlin, where the Prussian king, Friedrich Wilhelm III, was so enchanted by her singing that he presented her with an emerald necklace and several times invited her to meet his family at Charlottenburg palace. It was during

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these visits that Pauline began her long friendship with Princess Augusta, the future Prussian queen.[42]

Inevitably, Pauline was compared to Malibran. It was a comparison she exploited. At her Paris concert debut, in December of that year, Pauline wore the same costume, a simple white dress with a black diamond, that Malibran had always worn. 'It is her sister come alive again,' wrote one critic. 'The same voice, the same singing method, the same style, a resemblance of talent that confounds, and yet not the slightest hint of imitation!' The poet Musset, the archpriest of the cult of Malibran, thought the resemblance 'so striking that it appears supernatural'.[43]

What Musset had idealized in Malibran he now saw in her sister: her exotic Spanish origins; her fiery, melancholic temperament; her freedom of expression; her natural appearance; and, above all, the purity of her singing, without any excess of virtuosity or Romantic effect. 'She abandons herself to inspiration with that easy simplicity which gives everything an air of grandeur,' Musset wrote. 'She sings as she breathes.'[44] Musset fell in love with her, and courted her relentlessly. He had met Pauline at a musical soirée organized by Madame Caroline Jaubert, one of Musset's former mistresses, and pursued the young singer. In the *Revue des deux mondes*, where he was a regular writer, Musset praised her singing to the skies. Using his connections, he opened doors for her to the most important salons of Paris.

The relatively small size of the music world, even in a city like Paris, meant that artists were heavily dependent on influential critics and patrons to promote their talent. Madame Jaubert's lively salon was one of a growing number in the fashionable Faubourg Saint-Germain to favour musical performances and conversations about art and music over political gossip. The weekly salon was attended by well-connected intellectuals, among them Prince Belgiojoso, the sculptor Jean-Auguste Barre and the Mussets, Alfred and his brother Paul, who shared a love of music, and adored Pauline. They organized her Paris concert debut in the Salle Ventadour on 15 December 1838, and spread in conversation and writing the conviction that she was a rising star.[45]

On the back of her success, Pauline spent the next spring in London, where she performed in two private concerts for Queen Victoria and made her opera debut as Desdemona in Rossini's *Otello* at Her Majesty's Theatre on 9 May 1839. Her mother had negotiated a very handsome fee, 6,000 francs (around £240) for her six performances, more than

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any other singer had ever been paid for a first appearance in London.[46] 'The public received me as if I were a returning favourite rather than a foreigner performing for them for the first time,' Pauline wrote to a friend on 13 May.

> I was so emotional that my voice choked during the first act. But in the second, as their interest grew, I gained in strength and confidence, and by the end I was no longer terrified of the public . . . I was called back many times and repeated several airs. At the end of the [second] act, the whole of the stalls were on their feet, waving their cravats and handkerchiefs with frenetic cheers.[47]

The press reviews were ecstatic. 'There could be no doubt in anyone who saw that Desdemona on that night,' wrote the *Athenaeum* critic Henry Chorley of 'this new Garcia', that 'another great career was begun'.[48]

In London she received a visit from a certain Louis Viardot, a well-known journalist and man of letters, art collector and critic, Spanish expert and historian, who had recently become the director of the Théâtre Italien. A handsome and distinguished-looking man, then just turning forty, with finely barbered sideburns and moustache, Viardot had come to see if she would sing for his theatre. He seemed prepared to satisfy her monetary demands, declaring his belief in her talent as the equal of her sister's, whom he had known. On his appointment to the Théâtre Italien he had received a letter from Charles de Bériot recommending Pauline in such high terms that he thought at once of signing her as his new star.[49]

Louis Viardot was born in 1800 in Dijon, where his father was the Procurator General in the Court of Appeal. As a law student at the Sorbonne, he became an opera fan, spending every sou he could afford at the Théâtre Italien. It was there, in 1819, that he first heard Manuel Garcia sing in *Don Giovanni*. He skimped on meals to save for a ticket in the second balcony. For the next three years he did not miss a performance by Garcia or his family. He became a trusted friend and adviser to Malibran, who turned to him in her despair when she became pregnant with the child of Charles de Bériot in 1830 and needed legal help in seeking a divorce from Eugène Malibran.[50] Viardot was level-headed, kind and principled, with a fierce commitment to individual

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liberty, including the promotion of women's equal rights. He was the best man possible for Malibran to turn to in her desperate plight.

Viardot's attraction to the Garcias was strengthened by his interest in Spain. In 1823, a French expeditionary force of 60,000 troops was mandated by the five great powers at the Congress of Verona to invade Spain and restore the absolutist power of King Ferdinand VII, who had been imprisoned for the past three years by the leaders of a parliamentary government. Having graduated from law school, Viardot joined the expedition, considering it an 'opportunity to see the world'. Later he would come to view the restoration as a 'crime against the nascent constitutionalism of Spain'. But at the time he reconciled the trip with his democratic conscience by serving not as a soldier but as a provisioner to the French troops in Seville. He was proud of his military title ('*garde-magasin de liquides*'), because at the time of the Spanish Armada, in 1588, Cervantes had also worked as a supplier to the fleet based in Seville.[51]

The two years he spent in Seville began a life-long engagement with Spanish art and literature – one that would be shared by several generations of Frenchmen – and turned him from a lawyer into a writer. In the first of many books on Spain, *Lettres d'un Espagnol*, an epistolary novel published in two volumes in 1826, Viardot's impressions of the country animated his account of a French officer journeying through Andalusia – one of the 'most backward parts of Europe', ruined by the power of feudal institutions and the Church (and the French occupation), which 'needed to be opened to the influence of other European cultures for its civilization to develop'.[52] It was a founding statement of his cultural philosophy of internationalism.

Back in Paris, Viardot turned more and more to writing political commentary. Under the pseudonym of 'Y . . .' he appeared regularly in *Le Globe*, a literary journal that became increasingly vocal in its opposition to the reactionary French king, Charles X.[53] From 1830, *Le Globe* became the organ of the Saint-Simonians, an early socialist movement to which Viardot was loosely connected.

Viardot would not only write but take action too. He participated in the 1830 July Revolution, which replaced Charles with his more liberal cousin, Louis Philippe, the Duc d'Orléans, at the head of the July Monarchy. On the morning of 30 July, the last of the three days of the uprising, Viardot was in the offices of *Le Globe* preparing the first

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bulletin on the victory of the Revolution, when a young journalist charged by the Commission of the Hôtel de Ville to take control of the *préfecture de police* came in search of help. The two men went armed with rifles to the prefecture, which they occupied for the next twenty-four hours, getting the administration back to work and restoring the free movement of goods into Paris, which had been blocked by the militias during the fighting.[54]

In August 1830, the liberal Spanish exiles in Paris nominated Viardot as the leader of a 'revolutionary committee' to promote democracy in Spain. Louis Philippe had supported the initiative but his appointed government, led by Casimir-Pierre Périer (1831–2), turned out to be more conservative: it renounced foreign intervention, in the name of revolution in particular, and closed down Viardot's committee. Viardot joined the opposition to the July Monarchy. He became a journalist for radical republican journals, writing mainly about opera, theatre, art and politics, and worked as an editor of *La Revue républicaine*.[55] By the end of the 1830s, he was considered one of the major figures in the intellectual circles of Paris.

A fire started by an overheated stovepipe swept through the Théâtre Italien on 14 January 1838. The Salle Favart was destroyed. One of the directors of the theatre, Carlo Severini, burned to death.[56] Viardot stepped in to get the theatre back onto its feet, moving it to temporary quarters in the Théâtre de l'Odéon, and in June he was appointed its director on a salary of 12,000 francs a year. Viardot was respected for his business acumen – in addition to his journalism he also ran a city transport company which he called a 'social enterprise'.[57] But the key to his appointment was his friendship with the Spanish banker Alejandro Aguado, the Marquis de Las Marismas, a major power in the European opera world.[58]

Born in 1784 into one of Seville's leading noble families, Aguado had enrolled in the Spanish army, but went over to the French in 1810, when Napoleon's forces conquered Andalusia. He became an aide-de-camp to Marshal Soult, helping him in the wholesale pillaging of Spanish art and exporting it to France. When the French troops were expelled from Spain, he left with them and set up as a merchant in Paris, later becoming a financial broker for Spanish investors in France. His breakthrough came in 1823, when the heavily indebted Spanish government was forced to take a loan from France, its main protector

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following the intervention of that year. As one of the key players in setting up the loan, Aguado made a profit of around 5 million francs. From this point he acted as the Spanish government's banker, securing loans for it from the financial markets in Paris, and by the end of the 1820s he had amassed a fortune of over 20 million francs. He owned several mansions in Paris, the Château de Petit-Bourg in Évry-sur-Seine, a hunting estate at Grossouvre in the Cher, and in 1835, when he was even richer from securing loans for Algeria and Greece, he bought Château Margaux, the famous wine estate.[59]

Eager to convert his immense wealth into 'symbolic capital', Aguado bought up newspapers and amassed a collection of 400 paintings by the old masters (including 17 by Velázquez, 55 Murillos, 13 Zurbaráns, and 4 Rembrandts), which he opened to the public in 1837. Spanish art was little known in France until that time, but the opening of Aguado's gallery coincided with a growing interest, reflected in the founding of the Musée Espagnol by Louis Philippe in 1838. To publicize his gallery, Aguado commissioned Viardot, recognized as a connoisseur of Spanish painting, to write a study of the masters it contained for a book of engravings.[60]

Opera was Aguado's biggest interest and the focus of his lavish spending in Paris. A close friend of Rossini, he commissioned works from him, gave him large amounts of money, showered him with gifts, and opened up his palaces to him (Rossini wrote his operas *Le Comte Ory* and *William Tell* during his extended stays at Petit-Bourg in 1828–9).[61] It was through Rossini that Aguado became more involved in managing the Théâtre Italien and the Paris Opéra.

The Théâtre Italien was the first to fall to his control. In July 1829, the royal court signed a contract with Édouard Robert to run the theatre as a private enterprise for a period of fifteen years. Recommended by Rossini, Robert was Aguado's man, his 'pawn' (*prête-nom*), as he was described by the Paris prefect of police, who oversaw the royal theatres. The contract set a number of conditions for the director-entrepreneur to maintain the theatre in its 'present state of glory', for which the court would pay him an annual subsidy of 70,000 francs. His side of the contract was guaranteed by a surety (*cautionnement*) of 100,000 francs deposited by Aguado.[62]

The model set by this contract was then extended to the Opéra in a reform of February 1831. The July Revolution had added force to the

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idea that the theatre should be run as a business without burdening the public purse. The Opéra had amassed colossal debts, despite its growing subsidies during the 1820s. Its privileged position became a target for the liberal opposition, which also called for a renovation of its conservative repertoire. In February 1831, the government appointed a 'director-entrepreneur' to run it as a business for the next six years with an obligation to maintain it 'in the state of magnificence and splendour' appropriate for a national theatre. It was a form of public–private partnership. The director would receive a subsidy, which would be reduced as he brought the Opéra back into profit. The man chosen for this role was Louis-Désiré Véron, a doctor, journalist and businessman, who had made a small fortune by marketing a chest ointment for common colds. Like Robert, he was placed in the office by Aguado, who paid 200,000 of the 250,000 francs required as a surety.[63]

For the next ten years, Aguado effectively controlled the two main opera houses in Paris. He paid the surety for every director and spent a fortune on financing them.[64] The theatres' running costs were far higher than their subsidies and receipts from ticket sales: they depended on the Spanish banker to survive. Aguado's losses were considerable (at least 50,000 francs a year), but they were more than compensated for by the prestige which he gained. At the Salle Le Peletier he sat in the royal box, which had a sumptuously furnished antechamber and a private toilet (*lieu à l'anglaise*) for the king and queen. On the marriage of Ferdinand-Philippe, the Duc d'Orléans and heir to the throne, to the Duchess Hélène of Mecklenburg–Schwerin in 1837, Aguado gave his box as a wedding gift to the royal couple (and then had a similar but bigger suite converted from two other boxes for himself). After each performance, that night's takings were counted on a table placed outside Aguado's box, where he waited for the sum to be announced. Such was the banker's influence that at the Opéra, where a ballet was mandatory in any production, the costumes worn by the dancers were fashioned in a Spanish style and their fabrics put on sale in the theatre's shop, the *Garde-robe d'Aguado*, which opened in 1838. Fashionable members of the audience started coming dressed *à l'espagnol*.[65]

On his appointment by Aguado to the Théâtre Italien, Viardot looked for ways to bring it back into profit. One way of making opera pay was to combine the management of several theatres and share the

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singers between them. Barbaja had successfully combined the running of La Scala with the Italian season at the Kärntnertortheater in Vienna during the 1820s. Rossini had encouraged Aguado to think of Paris, London and Naples as the basis of an opera empire which he might build up by running them together as a single enterprise. Covent Garden and the San Carlo theatres were both in financial crisis in the 1830s, so their leases might be cheaply acquired. Viardot wrote a memorandum for the Spanish banker in which he proposed a merger of the two Paris opera houses with Covent Garden. It would save on costs, because the same singers could be used in both cities (the Paris season ended in the spring before the beginning of the season in London); and it could make handsome profits if a larger theatre was constructed on the site of the Salle Le Peletier to increase the audience capacity. A good case could be made to the government that France's glory would be served by a bigger opera house.[66]

In May 1839, Viardot left for London with instructions from Aguado to buy the Covent Garden lease. On 1 June, Viardot reported that the trustees would not sell; they had already rejected three offers in excess of £80,000, and were holding out, he had been told, for £90,000 (2.26 million francs). He thought that at that price a purchase still made business sense. The failing London theatre could be turned around, bringing in a profit of perhaps £6,000 (150,000 francs) a year, if it was combined with the Opéra and the Théâtre Italien. 'But for that,' he concluded, 'we must first put our affairs in Paris in order.'[67]

The fire at the Salle Favart had been a major setback for the Théâtre Italien. Its new home at the Odéon was less well located on the left bank of the Seine for its mainly right-bank clientele. To boost ticket sales for the coming autumn season, Viardot purchased three new Donizetti operas, and it was then, after hearing Pauline sing in London, that he called on her to see if she would sign for the Théâtre Italien.

His negotiations with her mother, then still acting as her manager, proved difficult. Joaquina was no fool. She knew what price she could earn for her daughter and did not hesitate to turn down any offer if it fell short.[68] The deal she struck with Viardot was expensive for the Théâtre Italien. Pauline would be paid 4,500 francs a month, 27,000 for the whole season, and take half the profits from a benefit, a sum guaranteed by the management to be at least 5,000 francs. 'I do not

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know if the financial conditions will appear to you a little hard,' Viardot wrote to Aguado on 1 June,

> but I have always thought, and you have shared my opinion, that we need to engage Pauline Garcia, at any price, whatever success she may have or not in the future. In effect, more than staying at the Odéon, what matters most is to push up sales of season tickets so as to ensure the theatre's income independently of the artists' or productions' chances of success. The best way for certain is to pique in advance the curiosity of your *parroquianos* [parishioners] by promising them a new and already celebrated talent.[69]

Pauline returned to Paris on her own to begin rehearsals at the Théâtre Italien in September. She wrote to Joaquina in Brussels saying how she wished she was in Paris for her debut there and that she had kept a room for her in case she came. She felt let down that Charles de Bériot had left Paris on a concert tour days before her premiere.[70] In the absence of her mother and Charles she must have become more dependent on Viardot. She needed the protection of a manager against rival prima donnas, jealous of the highly paid and heavily promoted newcomer. Despite the malicious rumours which they circulated against her, Pauline made a brilliant debut in the part of Desdemona in Rossini's *Otello* on 8 October.

Musset praised her to the skies in the *Revue des deux mondes*. 'The whole of Paris was drawn to the Odéon' for the first night, he wrote. 'There was a moment of silence when Mlle Garcia entered on the stage. The young artist was visibly moved, she hesitated, but before she was able to open her mouth, she was greeted by unanimous applause from all parts of the theatre. Was it the memory of her sister that had moved us to do that?' Whereas Malibran had played Desdemona as a 'Venetian heroine – love, anger, terror, everything about her was exuberant,' Musset wrote, her younger sister played her in a manner that was truer to Rossini, 'as a girl who loves naively, who wishes to be pardoned for her love, who weeps in the arms of her father at the very moment when he is about to curse her, and has courage only at the moment of her death'. The public was delighted by her innocent appearance (she wore a plain white dress to conjure memories of her sister), by the naturalness of her acting, without grand dramatic gestures, and by the purity of her singing. Some were bemused by the freshness of

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her performance, the likes of which had not been seen before. Marie d'Agoult was ill-disposed towards Pauline. She wrote to Liszt that the young singer was 'ugly, badly dressed, and ungainly'. Yet even she acknowledged that she had a 'magnificent voice', which elevated her role to tragic heights in spite of these 'blemishes'. Pauline had the air of 'a proud and noble woman with an immense future before her', d'Agoult reluctantly concluded. Two decades later, in his history of the nineteenth-century French theatre, Gautier wrote about her debut that 'no one could forget her adorable gaucherie and naiveté worthy of the frescoes of Giotto'.[71]

Pauline's debut was the talk of Paris, and everybody wanted to meet her. Viardot introduced her to George Sand, who had recently returned from her country house at Nohant in central France with the composer Chopin, her lover. A great fan of Malibran, Sand went to hear her sister sing, and at once pronounced her to be 'the first, the only great and true singer', a 'priestess of the ideal in music'. Sand befriended the young star. Old enough to be her mother (she was thirty-five), Sand became her champion and counsellor, her 'maternal and dearest friend', as Pauline addressed her in their many letters during the 1840s. 'It seems to me,' Sand wrote in her diary, 'that I love Pauline with the same sacred love I have for my son and daughter, and to all those tender feelings I add enthusiasm inspired by her genius.'[72]

The writer saw Pauline as the embodiment of her feminist ideal of artistic freedom and autonomy. She would use her as the model for her heroine in *Consuelo*, a romantic saga serialized in 1842–3 in *La Revue indépendante*, a left-wing journal she had founded with Louis Viardot and Pierre Leroux in 1841.[73] Consuelo is a simple Spanish girl with a divine operatic gift. She arrives in Venice in the 1750s, becomes a leading singer in the courts of Europe, and, because she is devoted to her art, refuses to be tied down by any man or marriage, although in a sequel, *The Countess of Rudolstadt* (1843), she is reunited with Albert, a loyal spiritual companion, and eventually marries him. Sand based her heroine on what she wanted Pauline to become. She tried to shape the real life of her young friend and protégée, as she had shaped the story of her heroine.

Sand was determined to protect Pauline from the amorous attentions of Musset, who ended up proposing to the young singer.[74] Sand's own stormy love affair with the romantic poet had left her deeply

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wounded, not least by his treatment of her infidelities in his autobiographical novel, *The Confession of a Child of the Century* (1835). Knowing him to be a womanizer and libertine, Sand thought that Musset was unsuitable as a suitor for Pauline, who needed a more stable and undemanding husband to pursue her career (a view shared by Pauline's other female patron, Caroline Jaubert).[75] Sand had in mind her old friend Louis Viardot, who was in any event already showing a keen interest in Pauline, inviting her and Joaquina to his house for dinner with Aguado, Donizetti and the painter Ary Scheffer.[76]

Viardot had all the qualities required to fulfil the role of Pauline's husband, manager, protector, friend and spiritual companion. Old enough to be her father, he was not driven by the egotism of a younger and artistic man such as Musset, and would not have any problem putting her career first, supporting it indeed with his business skills in theatre management. He had excellent connections in society, in the artistic, literary and theatre worlds. By taking on the role of Pauline's manager, he could promote her career more effectively than her mother Joaquina, who as a woman was at a disadvantage in the opera business, despite her undoubted strengths. Viardot, in addition, would give Pauline the respectability that her sister never had because of her scandalous affair with Charles de Bériot. Since the death of Malibran there had been malicious rumours that Bériot, who had led Pauline's concert tours to London, Brussels, Leipzig and Berlin, had in turn been having an affair with her and was about to marry her.[77] Worried that such gossip might ruin her career in its infancy, Sand urged Pauline to accept Viardot's offer of marriage, and recommended him to Joaquina as not just her daughter's husband but her manager.

This was not to be a marriage of passion. Louis was a decent, kind and intelligent man. He stirred deep feelings of friendship and affection in Pauline but not strong romantic emotions. She depended on his advice and support (without them she would have been lost) and felt blessed to have him as her husband. But she was 'unable to return his deep and ardent love, despite the best will in the world', as she herself once confessed.[78]

In a revealing letter to her confidante and friend, the German composer and conductor, Julius Rietz, in 1858, Pauline introduced her husband thus:

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